4-H CLUBS IN MANITOBA

MANITOBA

DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL
AFFAIRS AND HISTORICAL RESOURCES

Historic Resources Branch

Honourable Eugene Kostyra
Minister

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4-H CLUBS IN MANITOBA

Since 1913 members of 4-H Clubs across Manitoba and Canada have pledged the use of their heads, hearts, hands and health for the betterment of their clubs, communities and country. Known as the Boys' and Girls' Clubs until 1952, 4-H had its small beginning in the agricultural community of Roland, Manitoba. Dedicated to the principle of "learning to do by doing," the first clubs were organized to promote agricultural progress through the education of rural children. In addition to learning about everything from canning and sewing to grain farming and livestock raising, members were encouraged to work together toward common goals. By promoting leadership skills, cooperation and a strong sense of community spirit, 4-H Clubs have made and continue to make a valuable contribution to the quality of rural life.

The Origins of 4-H

The first decade of the twentieth century was an important one in the development of rural Manitoba. From 1901 to 1911 the rural population increased from 184,738 to 255,249, largely through immigration. Most of the newcomers became farmers and homesteaders, but very few arrived with a knowledge of the methods required to transform the dry prairie on which they settled into productive farmland.

Recognizing the growing need for education, the provincial Department of Agriculture (now Manitoba Agriculture) established the Manitoba Agricultural College (now the Agricultural Extension Centre in Brandon). The college offered classes and conducted experiments and research, while an Extension Service, established that same year, sought to bring "agricultural education to the farmer's very door." Through short courses, lectures and local demonstrations, the Extension Services attempted to educate new and established farmers and thus improve farming in Manitoba.

Partly as a result of their efforts, the province produced a record 60,275,000 bushels of wheat from 2,979,734 acres in 1911. During the depression of 1912-13, however, farmers had to contend with falling wheat prices, dropping land values and rising freight rates. It became almost impossible for these farmers to prosper and expand, even if they were not completely dependent on wheat as a cash crop. Moreover, although the rural population was still increasing at this time, centres like Winnipeg were absorbing most of the new immigrants and were growing at a much faster rate. Eventually, these towns and cities would surpass rural Manitoba in size and influence.

In these circumstances, people concerned about the future of agriculture were determined, first of all, to promote a rational and scientific approach to the development of farming that would offset the worst effects of economic crises and natural disasters. Secondly, they were committed to preserving the influence and importance of the rural way of life. The extension programs of the Department of Agriculture helped in part to fulfil these goals, but until 1913 its programs were aimed solely at adults.

In addition to its work with farmers, the Department of Agriculture also responded to the needs of rural women. In 1910 they began to fund and help organize Home Economics Societies, later known as Women's Insitutes. Through the work of these societies and through the short courses and lectures offered to them by Extension Services, rural women were joined together in an effort to improve their homes and communities. By 1913, it was clear that the development of programs for adults was not enough. With the help of the people of Roland, Manitoba, the Department of Agriculture and Extension Services initiated a new organization designed for rural youth.*

The Boys' and Girls' Clubs

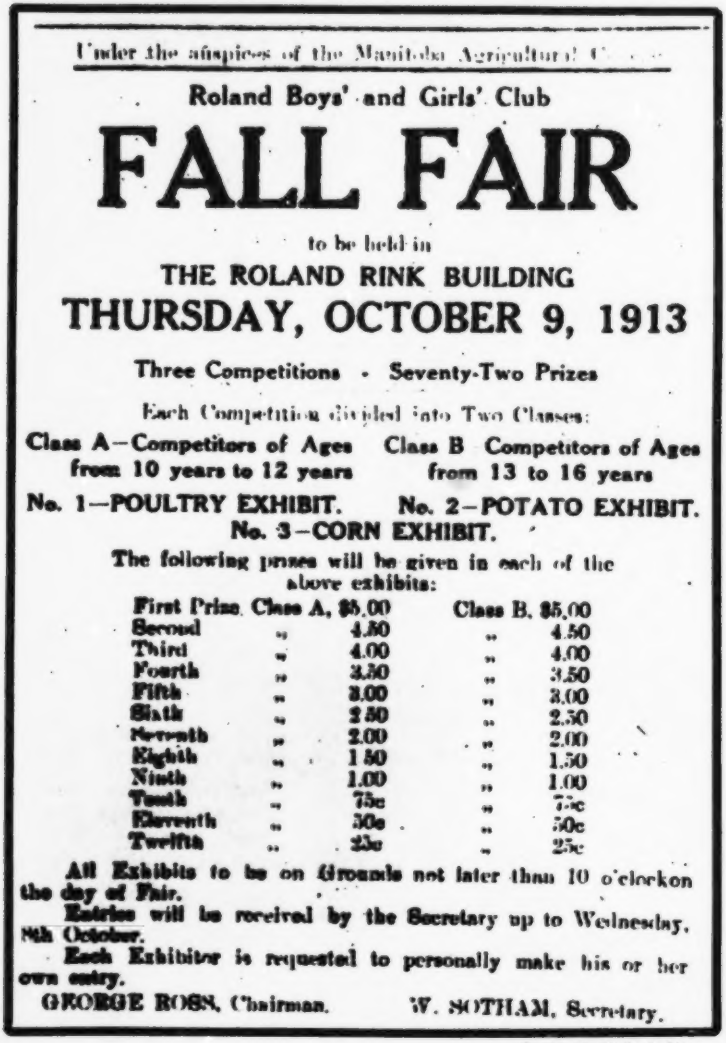
In 1913 the officials of the Department of Agriculture and Extension Services approached the people of Roland to help organize clubs to teach farm skills to young people. The community's response was enthusiastic. The Roland School Trustees had already attempted to initiate a vegetable and garden competition for local school children in 1911, and although interest had been limited, the idea of practical agricultural education for the young had survived. Moreover, Roland was a thriving agricultural community of some 600 people who had developed their own Agricultural Society and who had experience in farm competitions and demonstrations.

Courtesy Manitoba Archives

E. Ward Jones,
one of the founding fathers
of the Boys' and Girls' Clubs

* The 4-H and Youth Section of Manitoba Agriculture is now part of the Agricultural Training Branch, as is the Agricultural Extension Centre in Brandon.

On 23 April 1913, E. Ward Jones, an agricultural expert and one of the recognized founders of the Boys' and Girls' Clubs, wrote on behalf of Extension Services to George Ross, Reeve of the Municipality of Roland. In the letter he described how the proposed Boys' and Girls' clubs would



Under the auspices of the Manitoba Agricultural [illegible]

Roland Boys' and Girls' Club

FALL FAIR

to be held in

THE ROLAND RINK BUILDING

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 9, 1913

Three Competitions - Seventy-Two Prizes

Each Competition divided into Two Classes:

Class A—Competitors of Ages from 10 years to 12 years

Class B Competitors of Ages from 13 to 16 years

No. 1—POULTRY EXHIBIT. No. 2—POTATO EXHIBIT.
No. 3—CORN EXHIBIT.

The following prizes will be given in each of the above exhibits:

	Class A, $5.00	Class B, $5.00
First Prize		
Second	" 4.50	" 4.50
Third	" 4.00	" 4.00
Fourth	" 3.50	" 3.50
Fifth	" 3.00	" 3.00
Sixth	" 2.50	" 2.50
Seventh	" 2.00	" 2.00
Eighth	" 1.50	" 1.50
Ninth	" 1.00	" 1.00
Tenth	" 75c	" 75c
Eleventh	" 50c	" 50c
Twelfth	" 25c	" 25c

All Exhibits to be on Grounds not later than 10 o'clockon the day of Fair.

Entries will be received by the Secretary up to Wednesday, 8th October.

Each Exhibitor is requested to personally make his or her own entry.

GEORGE ROSS, Chairman. W. SOTHAM, Secretary.

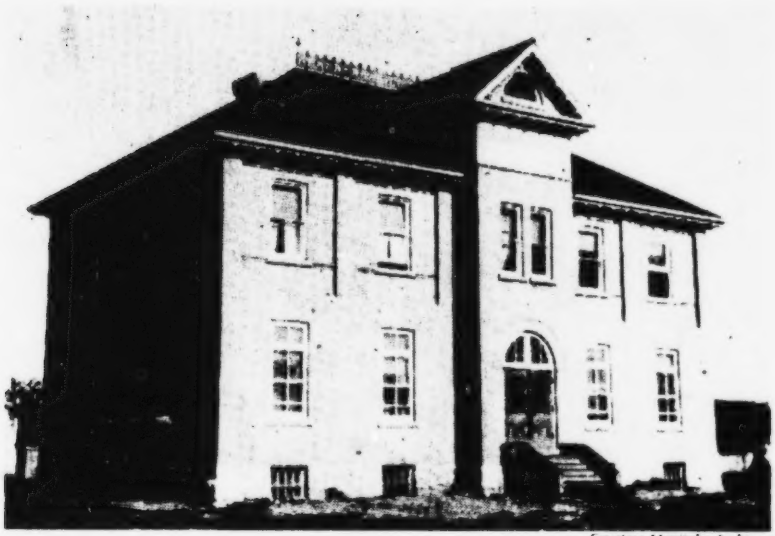
Courtesy Manitoba Archives

An advertisement for the first fall fair of the Roland Boys' and Girls' Clubs, printed in the Roland newspaper on 2 October 1913

be organized. The department planned to take "four consolidated schools and four under the rural system" in districts where a fall school fair could be held. Each child who joined the club was to receive one dozen purebred eggs, a quantity of purebred potatoes for seed and three hundred grains of the best three varieties of fodder corn. A man would be sent from Extension Services to help organize the club and to distribute material. Over the summer the children would raise chickens, grow potatoes and corn and then present their work at the fall fair competition where it would be judged. Other activities were planned — a tour of the college in Winnipeg, lectures and excursions — but the competition offered at the fall fair was seen as the best way to encourage participation.

Courtesy Manitoba Archives

Two competitors in the sewing contest at the Gladstone Boys' and Girls' Club, c. 1918



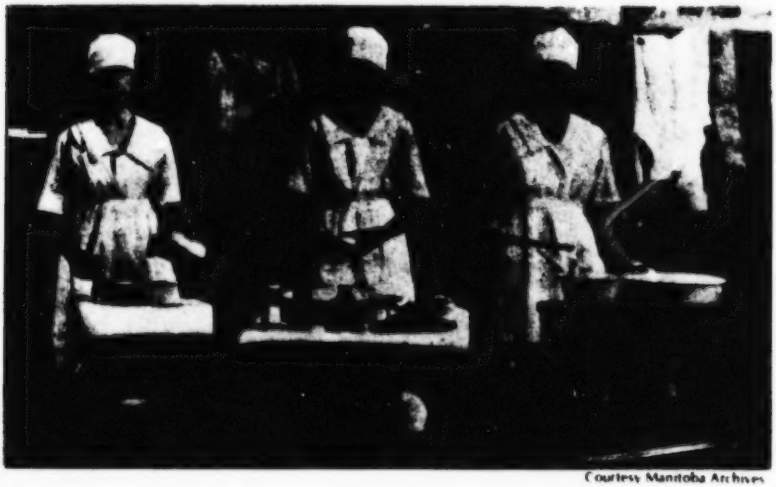
Courtesy Manitoba Archives

Roland School, c. 1913, scene of early Boys' and Girls' Club Activities

The fall fair in Roland turned out to be a great success. As a result, Extension Services arranged to have the boys and girls put on an exhibition at the Brandon poultry show in December 1913. Moreover, one hundred farm boys, who were the winners in an essay competition sponsored by the clubs, were sent to the Winnipeg Exhibition for one week.

The essays written by these rural youths showed that prizes were not the only rewards gained from participation in club work. Writing on "The Prairie Farm," the contestants expressed the meaning of rural life. One youngster wrote that "of all the boys who live in Canada, I think the one living on the prairie farm should be the happiest." He described the hard work and the continual battle against natural enemies, as well as the pleasures derived from success and from the picturesque prairie landscape.

The Report of the Department of Agriculture and Immigration for 1913 noted the enthusiasm of the 472 members in eight clubs across the province who had "gained much practical agricultural knowledge from their summer club work." This enthusiasm continued into the next year, when the number of clubs increased to twenty-eight and the number of fall fairs exhibiting poultry, corn and potatoes rose to twenty. In Roland, a home economics exhibit was also introduced at the second annual fall fair.



Courtesy Manitoba Archives

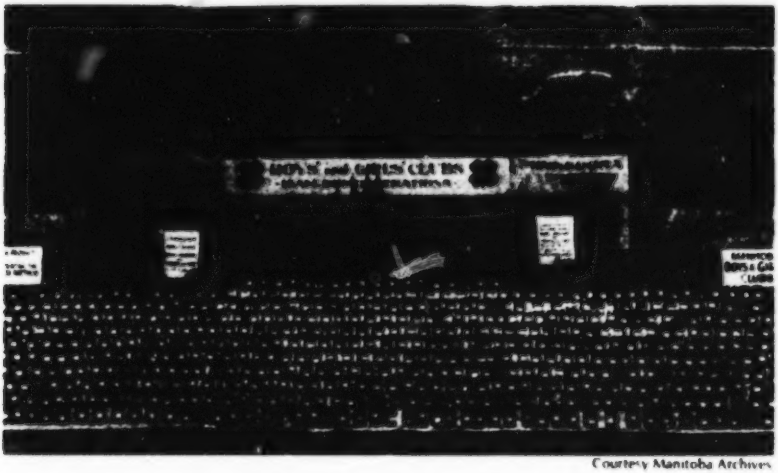
The 1920 provincial champion dyeing team from Medora, Manitoba

The First World War took its toll in leadership, but with the help of local school teachers and other officials, sixty-eight clubs were organized in Manitoba in the spring of 1915. Through "true western perseverance," club membership rose to 4,500. The participants took pride in their year's work and developed "a new idea of the dignity and interest in agriculture."

During this period the clubs set out to teach youngsters how to arrange their own meetings, debate their own issues and to center these activities around their own club work. The aim was to produce capable leaders and organizers who would eventually take a leading role in the development of agriculture in Manitoba. In 1920, this spirit of communication and team work was encouraged by the introduction of team demonstrations, in which members combined practical skills with cooperation and public speaking. This was another way by which the clubs brought rural youth together for their own personal benefit and for the benefit of the community as a whole.

Although leadership, organizational skills and good citizenship were promoted, the clubs never lost touch with their central goal — the encouragement of agricultural progress. In 1918 the 25,000 club members in Manitoba produced a quantity of food more than twice that of any previous year, and did much to improve the methods of food conservation.

In Roland, livestock development was particularly important in the years after the war. Even though official standards for hogs had changed drastically, no less than 38.5 per cent of the hogs from the district were



Courtesy Manitoba Archives

Food preservation: a display of canned fruits and vegetables at the 1926 Winnipeg Garden Show

graded select in 1923. Roland's Boys' and Girls' Club certainly contributed to this achievement. The club won highest honours in the hog demonstration at Winnipeg in 1923 and went on to capture provincial and national awards, including the gold cup at the Royal Winter Fair in Toronto.

A trip to the Royal Winter Fair was fast becoming the most important reward for the special individual and team efforts of the Boys' and Girls' clubs. When these annual trips were first organized by the CNR in 1924, the clubs were already well-established in Manitoba and throughout Canada. There were many different forms of organization and local sponsorship, but the provincial departments of agriculture and education, along with local authorities and business groups, were generally involved in the support of the clubs.

In Manitoba the direction of club work changed hands in the mid-twenties. The Department of Education took formal control after providing unofficial leadership through local school teachers during the war years. Department of Agriculture Extension Service officials remained involved, and in 1928 they were once again made formally responsible for the clubs so that Manitoba would be operating under the same system as other provinces. Many differences remained, and participants throughout Canada took part in a wide range of projects. Nevertheless, club members across the nation all had a common desire to "learn to do by doing" and a determination to work towards the national competition which would recognize their special achievements.

Changing Times and Changing Priorities

Despite the importance and excitement of the national competition at the Royal Winter Fair, there was a need for some form of unity in the national club movement. This reached a climax at the end of the 1920s when the rapid, uncoordinated growth of the club network was complicated by the onset of the Great Depression. The impact of drought, dwindling markets, lack of supplies for clubs and uncertain financial support led to the formation of the Canadian Council of Boys' and Girls' Clubs in 1931.

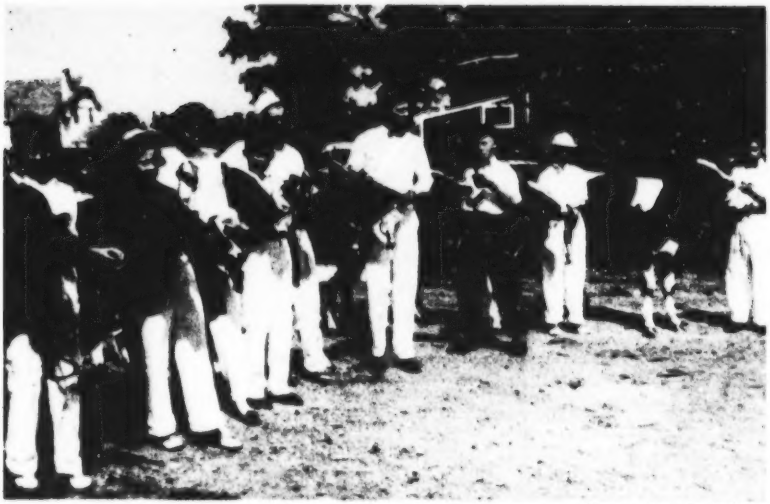
The Council was created to provide national guidance and leadership and to encourage and direct the financial support provided by business organizations. Although it became increasingly important over the years, the council never interfered with the formation of clubs or project development at the local and regional level. In many cases, especially during the Depression, local club work was directed by the members themselves.

In 1935, 1200 Manitoba girls were involved in clothing and food projects. They depended on volunteer leadership and the merits of their own work to encourage participation, since there was no prize money available for competitions. The girls elected their own officers, and some used the skills they had learned in classes to sew garments that brought in extra money for themselves and their families during these difficult years.

In Roland, the sewing program was carried on through the school in connection with the Extension Service, and it helped to keep the idea of club work alive in the years of the Second World War. The Depression had dealt a severe blow to agricultural clubs across the province, and they did not reappear in Roland until after the war in a period of economic recovery. In 1946 a Clothing Club was formally founded in Roland, and shortly afterward agricultural clubs were revived.

The clubs were flourishing again by the mid-fifties, but those involved knew that changes were necessary if members were to keep pace with a new and different world. In 1952 the name "4-H Clubs" was officially adopted, and in 1953 leadership councils were appointed to develop new training methods. Perhaps the most important change, however, came in 1956 with the elimination of the national 4-H competitions at the Royal Winter Fair.

For some time many club officials in Manitoba and Canada had expressed reservations about the value of the national competition. In November 1954, F.J. Weir, Manitoba's provincial horticulturalist, wrote to an official of the Department of Agriculture explaining some of the problems created by the competition. Too much time, he said, was being spent preparing two or three team-members for the Toronto fair. In his opinion the efforts of the department's specialists could have been more evenly divided amongst the membership. Other, more general concerns included the problem of inequality of opportunity from district to district and, most importantly, the fear that the movement was becoming too materialistic, too preoccupied with the winning of prizes.



Courtesy Manitoba Archives

The Fort Garry Dairy Calf Club Show, 8 August 1953

As a result, the leaders decided that it was time to reclaim the idea of Roland — to take pride in the experience of learning practical skills in cooperation with others for the improvement of the community and the country.

With the national competitions removed, National 4-H Week became a time for sight-seeing, discussion and debate. Organizers and members from all areas of Canada contributed, and many identified the growing need for national and international knowledge and understanding. These new developments promoted new activities and helped to expand older ones. Several exchanges were organized during this period and an interprovincial exchange program was established in 1963. In Manitoba, the 4-H camps at Killarney, Gimli, Dauphin and Wellman were established in the 1960s to encourage year-round participation in club work.

Club activities and projects were also expanded to include many new subjects. Self-determined projects were introduced which allowed members to choose topics that were of personal value and interest. Many members chose to examine subjects such as careers, studies, recreation and community services. With the help of the national organization, members were also encouraged to think about the role of agriculture in the world economy and to consider not only the problems of hunger and scarcity but also the political situation in Canada and the rest of the world.

These activities may have seemed only distantly related to the origins and early goals of the first Boys' and Girls' Club, but in 1963

Courtesy Manitoba Archives

Unveiling of the plaque in Roland, Manitoba commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of Canadian 4-H Clubs

when the clubs celebrated their fiftieth anniversary, their primary function was still to promote the progress of agriculture and the education of rural youth. Despite their rapid expansion and their increasingly national and international outlook, 4-H clubs have remained grassroots organizations, strongly attached to the needs and wishes of the rural community. Even though a decreasing rural population reduced mem-

bership in Manitoba, the clubs survived. In Roland, 4-H is still represented by a sewing club and a beef club whose members continue to "learn to do by doing."

Suggestions for Further Reading

The Story of 4-H in Canada, is printed and distributed free of charge by the Canadian 4-H Council, 323 Chapel Street, Ottawa, K1N 7Z2. A history of 4-H in Canada, written by Barbara Villy Cormack will be printed and available in the near future.

A history of 4-H in Roland, Manitoba prepared by the Roland Agricultural Society is entitled, *Fifty Years of 4-H in Roland, Manitoba,* (Roland: Roland Agricultural Society, 1963). The reader may also want to consult documents pertaining to 4-H in the Manitoba Agriculture collection at the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.

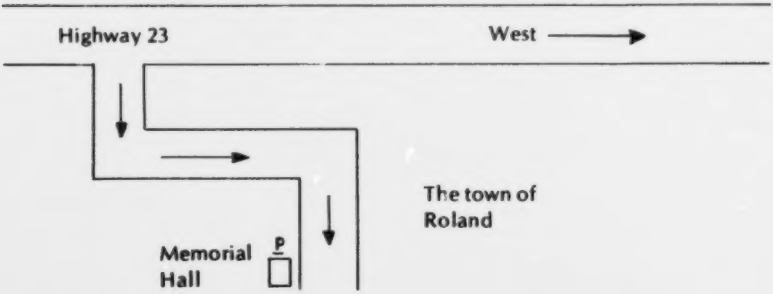
Credits

Special thanks to the Provincial Archives of Manitoba for the use of their collections. Thanks are also due to the 4-H Section, Agricultural Training Branch, Manitoba Agriculture, for their help and co-operation.

The cover illustration is the official crest of the 4-H Clubs.

4-H CLUBS OF CANADA
Commemorating those persons whose faith and interest in rural youth led to the establishment at Roland in 1913 of the first of Canada's Boys' and Girls' Clubs, known since 1952 as the 4-H Clubs. Fifty years after those first beginnings, members of Canadian Clubs, together with 4-H members throughout the world, continue to pledge Head, Heart, Hands, and Health to the greater service of their Clubs, Communities and Countries.
THE HISTORIC SITES ADVISORY BOARD OF MANITOBA

This plaque is located on the grounds of Roland's Memorial Hall.



OUR HERITAGE

We have received great gifts as our heritage in Canada — beautiful rivers and parks, rolling hills, trees and grassland; the rich resources of nature are ours to protect, cherish and enjoy.

Wherever man has been, there are marks of defilement and destruction — let us resolve that this shall not be our legacy to the twenty-first century. Let us rather honour and emulate those who went before us as pioneers, who gave of themselves, building and creating, enriching the land. They have earned our thanks, and while we cannot repay them, we can respect their achievements and resolve that we will try to follow them in action and in attitude.

For this we set aside this special place in our Province, a site that is part of history.

POOR

QUALITY

ORIGINAL